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ABSTRACT

This guide contains a detailed, six-section curriculum that frames the debate over Mark Twain's novel "Huck Finn," asks students to think critically about it, and helps them to see the novel in a richer historical and literary context. The first section introduces students to the history of the controversy surrounding "Huck Finn" and touches on the racism that supported the system of slavery. Section two of the guide addresses charges that Jim is more a stereotype than a fully realized character. The third and fourth sections deal with character development, satire, irony, point of view, and authorial intent in relation to Jim and Huck's roles in the novel. The fifth section introduces "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass" as an example of the important slave narrative literary tradition. Section six presents a variety of culminating activities in which students use writing, debates, drama, and oral presentations to document their knowledge, analyze how they feel about the controversy, and explore the meaning of the novel. Each section includes an explanation of the section, companion readings for teachers and students, teaching suggestions, discussion questions, and activities. The activities address the four components emphasized by the National Standards for Language Arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Includes a general resources section, which lists 12 Web sites and 9 organizations. (Contains 62 references.) (PM)

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Huck Finn in Context:

A Teaching Guide

A Companion Guide to
"Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*"

One of four films of the CULTUREKNOCKS series
Premieres January 2000

CS 511 464

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left: Illustration by Elliott Banfield
cover: Section of Mural by Thomas Hart Benton

Introduction

The PBS film series CULTURE SHOCK tells the stories of four now-classic works of art that have been censored or challenged. Through painting, music, film, and literature, the series poses questions about art, censorship, and society that are still hotly debated today: What is the role of art in society? Can art change society or behavior? Should the arts ever be censored? CULTURE SHOCK explores the richness and complexity of these issues by examining the furor surrounding Manet's famous 1865 painting of a nude, *Olympia;* the "subversive" nature of 1920s jazz; the Production Code era of Hollywood movies; and the Mark Twain novel that has seemed "born to trouble"—*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. (See page 4 for a more extensive description of each film.)

WGBH developed this teacher's guide to accompany one of the four CULTURE SHOCK films, "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*." The guide focuses on Twain's famous novel—one of the most beloved *and* the most challenged novels in America—by exploring the controversy surrounding the book, then and now, and providing a comprehensive curriculum that places the book within its historical, literary, and cultural context. (A teacher's guide to the entire CULTURE SHOCK series is also available. See page 39.)

Originally developed by the Cherry Hill, New Jersey, school district in response to objections to the book, the curriculum has enhanced both the teaching of the novel and communication among parents, teachers, and administrators. Many school districts have responded to complaints about the book by either ignoring parents' concerns or by removing the book from the curriculum. Instead, administrators, teachers, students, and parents in Cherry Hill came together to talk about their concerns.

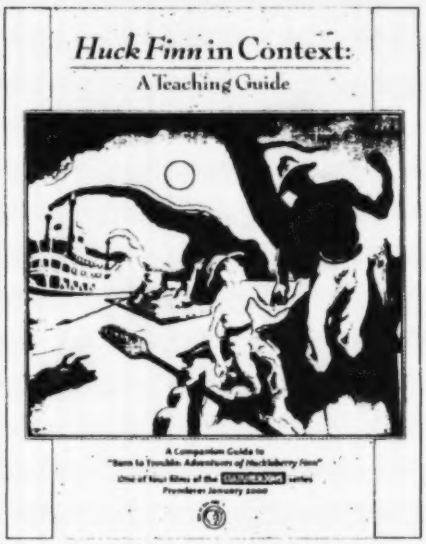
The resulting curriculum, developed by two Cherry Hill high school English teachers and three professors from nearby Villanova University, provides imaginative lessons that deal with the objections about the book while maintaining the integrity of the novel as a work of literature. Our adaptation of the Cherry Hill curriculum (see pages 16–28) contains additional readings, discussion questions, activities, and resources, and uses the documentary "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" to spark discussion.

Although teachers of *Huck Finn* may find the story of what happened at Cherry Hill especially helpful, the Cherry Hill case can also serve as a model for school communities faced with challenges to other topics, methods, or materials. In addition to the curriculum itself, the perspectives and advice offered by the participants (see pages 10–14) may help other school districts turn a divisive issue into an opportunity for bringing people together. The story of Cherry Hill is thus not only about a new teaching approach but about tackling two of our most difficult dilemmas—racism and censorship—and creating new partnerships and a new kind of dialogue.

LIKE KATHY MONTEIRO, the Tempe, Arizona, parent featured in the film who objected to the book, parents in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, objected to *Huck Finn* on the grounds that "the prejudicial effect of the racial characterizations outweigh any literary value that the book might have." We have chosen to focus on the Cherry Hill case and curriculum because it presents an innovative approach to addressing the issues that are raised when the book is used in the classroom. For information about the outcome of the Monteiro case, see page 5.

Illustration by E.W. Kemble from the first American edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

How to Use the Guide



This guide contains a detailed, six-section **curriculum** that frames the debate over *Huck Finn*, asks students to think critically about it, and helps them to see the novel in a richer historical and literary context. Each section—designed to last from two days to two weeks, depending on the needs of the class—includes an explanation of the section, companion readings for teachers and students, teaching suggestions, discussion questions, and activities. The activities, including those that conclude the unit, address all four components emphasized by the National Standards for Language Arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. English teachers will find many of the traditional approaches to the novel embedded in the curriculum.

Section I introduces students to the history of the controversy surrounding *Huck Finn* and touches on the racism that supported the system of slavery and that continues today. "The 'N' Word" suggests ways of working with the repeated use of the word "nigger."

Section II addresses charges that Jim is more a stereotype than a fully realized character. By looking at historical and current stereotypes, students have a lens through which to evaluate Jim when they meet him in the novel.

Section III and ***Section IV*** deal with issues English teachers will already be familiar with—character development, satire and irony, point of view, and authorial intent. In this curriculum, however, Jim is dealt with not just as a foil for Huck, but on his own merits. Whether Jim or Huck is the true hero of the novel is also explored.

Section V introduces *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* as an example of the important slave narrative literary tradition, as well as poetry that expresses the reality of slavery and its legacy today. Students look back at the novel in a new context and think again about Twain's portrayal of America's "peculiar institution."

Section VI presents a variety of culminating activities. Through writing, debates, drama, and oral presentations, students are asked to document their knowledge, analyze how they feel about the controversy, and explore the meaning of the novel itself.

Taping Rights
You can tape the film "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" off the air and use it with your students for up to one year after its broadcast.

The "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" **Film Index** provides a description of the film divided into segments for easier access (see pages 32–33). The **General Resources** section (see pages 34–38) contains Web sites (including the CULTURE SHOCK Web site), a list of organizations, and an annotated bibliography.

The essay by scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Teaching Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" (see pages 29–31), provides an overview of the issues surrounding the book, as well as why it has endured as a classic work of American literature. You may use this essay for background reading and to inspire student discussion and writing. You may also want to refer to pages 116–125 of Fishkin's book, *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), which takes the reader through her experiences with a class discussion of these issues.

Huck Finn Coursepack
For a complete, reproducible set of the companion readings for the curriculum, along with a copy of the "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" video, order the *Huck Finn Coursepack* (see page 39).

About the *Culture Shock* Series

"Art gives form to our terrors as well as our desires." —Picasso

The power of the arts to enthrall *and* disturb is at the heart of the CULTURE SHOCK series. In addition to exploring themes that are central to current debates about cultural values, freedom of expression, and the role of the arts in society, each program tells the story of a now-classic work of art in literature, painting, music, or film that has been controversial and explores its relevance today.

The series examines questions that our society has grappled with in recent years: Can the arts go too far? How do new forms of art and popular culture emerge, and should there be limits? What motivates artists to create and audiences to react? Do the arts cause or reflect social behavior? What do conflicts about the arts tell us about who we are as a society? CULTURE SHOCK is about creative inspiration, social history, how culture evolves, and the role of the arts in our lives.

Each film in the CULTURE SHOCK series, premiering in January/February 2000, shows viewers how the arts can reflect and influence society. By examining works of art that were once controversial but have since become icons, changing the way we see the world and ourselves, CULTURE SHOCK celebrates the arts and their complex, essential role in society.

Any or all of these films can be shown as part of a unit on *Huck Finn* and censorship, as each poses similar questions and explores many common themes. For a more in-depth look at the entire series, the CULTURE SHOCK *Teacher's Guide* provides discussion questions, curricular links, and activities. It also suggests links to literature already being taught in the English/Language Arts curriculum. See page 39 for ordering information.

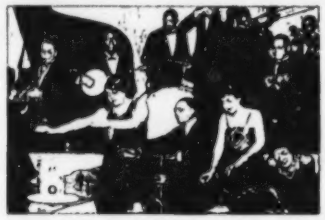
The Films

for more information see facing page

Born to Trouble:
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Set against a backdrop of American history before the Civil War, the film tells the story of a book that is a literary icon yet has been attacked by the public longer and more continuously than any other American novel. The complex connections between race, culture, politics, and morality are made vivid and powerful as the film chronicles Twain's literary genius; the culture that shaped the novel; the hundred-year-old conflicts surrounding it; and the book's importance in America and around the world. (90 minutes)

Shock of the Nude:
Manet's Olympia
The famous French masterpiece, identified by scholars as the first truly modern painting, caused an uproar when it was first exhibited in Paris in 1865. In fact, the gallery was forced to hire police officers to protect the canvas from visitors who wanted to destroy it. What inspired Manet to paint it, and why were Parisian audiences and critics so outraged? Who was the real *Olympia*, and what became of her? This program poses the problem of the nude—visual art's most enduring, universal subject. (60 minutes)

Hollywood Censored: Movies, Morality & the Production Code
In the 1920s, moviemakers struggled with would-be censors over what could—and couldn't—be shown on the screen. Sexy sirens and shoot-'em-up violence were attacked by religious and government groups and other concerned citizens. In 1931 Hollywood responded by adopting a self-imposed Production Code to ensure that its movies were "safe" for family viewing. Three years later Will Hays, the head of the Motion Picture Association, hired Joe Breen to enforce the Code more strictly. The restrictions of the Production Code influenced movies for many years to come. (60 minutes)



The Devil's Music: 1920s Jazz
In its early years jazz faced resistance across America. Like rap today, jazz was considered a dangerous influence on young people and society. It featured improvisation and the rhythms of the African American experience over classical music forms. As jazz's popularity grew, moralists fought to suppress the music before it finally won acceptance. How did this new artistic genre become recognized as an American classic? (60 minutes)

top left: Mural by Thomas Hart Benton
top right: Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863
bottom left: *Scarface*, 1932
bottom right: Sunset Cafe, Chicago, 1922

About the Film:
"Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*"

Throughout the film, writers and scholars comment on just what makes *Huck Finn* controversial, compelling, and relevant to the times we live in. Scholars such as David Bradley, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Jim Miller, and Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua examine its language, the characters of Huck and Jim, the time period in which it was written, and Twain's intent in writing the novel.

Teachers who want to help students understand the history of debate around the novel might want to show the film at the beginning of their study of *Huck Finn*. Although the film does retell the plot of the book, and in one comment alludes to the ending ("Jim risks his freedom to nurse Tom when Tom is injured by a bullet. Finally, Tom reveals his secret that Jim is a free man."), it is so embedded in the context of why the book is controversial that teachers should not find that it "gives away" the ending before students read. The film can also be shown at any point in a study of the novel.

Teachers may want to show the film before *and* after the book is read. Students can then explain, change, or enhance their opinions on the book and the controversy.

Using the Film

Film Index: See pages 32–33 for an index to the film. This index describes the film in detail and divides it into segments that can be easily selected for classroom use.

Preview: As with any film, preview "Born to Trouble" before using it with your class.

Taping Rights: You can tape the film and use it with your students for up to one year after its broadcast.

Videos: You may also purchase a video of the film or a video set of the entire 4-part CULTURE SHOCK series (see page 39).

IN ADDITION TO LOOKING AT the history of the book, the film also chronicles the recent crusade of Kathy Monteiro and her daughter, Raquel Panton, to remove *Huck Finn* from a high school required reading list in Tempe, Arizona. The claims of Monteiro that her daughter and other African American students suffered psychological injuries (due to increasingly frequent and intense racial harassment by the other students) and lost educational opportunities (during class discussions of the book African American students could read other books in the library) were dismissed by the United States District Court for the District of Arizona. In 1998 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the district court's decision regarding the ban on controversial literary works, saying that students' First Amendment rights would be violated if controversial works, such as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, were removed from a school's curriculum on the basis of their content. The court did find, however, that the school's failure to address the racial harassment was a violation of Title VI.

Parent Kathy Monteiro, Tempe, Arizona

Student Raquel Panton, Tempe, Arizona

About the Book: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

"Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Mark Twain,
Introductory note in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Ernest Hemingway declared that "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." T. S. Eliot called it a "masterpiece." Now an accepted part of the American literary canon, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is required reading in over 70 percent of American high schools and is among the most taught works of American literature.

Yet *Huck Finn* has been in trouble almost continuously since the day it was first published in America in 1885. The Concord Public Library in Massachusetts immediately banned it as "the veriest trash, suitable only for the slums." A newspaper account described the library's objections to the novel:

> *It deals with a series of adventures of a very low grade of morality; it is couched in the language of a rough dialect, and all through its pages there is a systemic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions. It is also very irreverent. . . . The whole book is of a class that is more profitable for the slums than it is for respectable people.*
>
> —St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, March 17, 1885

The Brooklyn Public Library followed suit in 1905, removing it from the children's room because Huck was a liar who "not only itched, but scratched," was dirty, used terrible grammar, and "said 'sweat' when he should have said 'perspiration.'" By 1907 libraries in Denver, Omaha, and Worcester (Massachusetts) had removed the book because Huck and Tom were "bad" role models. During the 1930s many libraries purchased expurgated or "junior" versions of the novel, which omitted sections and simplified the language.

According to the People for the American Way, the most frequently challenged books in 1995–1996 were the following (listed here in alphabetical order by title). Many of these titles, including *Huck Finn*, also appear on the list for 1982–1992.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson
The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger
The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier
The Color Purple by Alice Walker
A Day No Pigs Would Die by Robert Newton Peck
The Giver by Lois Lowry
Go Ask Alice by Anonymous
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
My Brother Sam Is Dead by Christopher and James Lincoln Collier
Native Son by Richard Wright
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

Over the years the novel has been declared "unfit for children" on a number of counts, but the indictment that has proven most persistent began in 1957, when the NAACP charged that *Huck Finn* contained "racial slurs" and "belittling racial designations." Since then, the book has been called racist for both the pervasive use of the word "nigger" and a portrayal of blacks that some people consider stereotypical and demeaning. It has been removed from reading lists in schools ranging from Texas to Pennsylvania (including, ironically, the Mark Twain Intermediate School in Fairfax, Virginia). Public libraries also continue to deal with requests that the book be removed, although the focus of the controversy has shifted to the classroom.

One of the most outspoken opponents of *Huck Finn* in the 1980s was John Wallace, then a school administrator, who went so far as to rewrite the novel without the word "nigger." He spoke for many of the book's critics when he wrote, in a 1982 *Washington Post* editorial,

> *"The reading aloud of* Huck Finn *in our classrooms is humiliating and insulting to black students. It contributes to their feelings of low self-esteem and to the white student's disrespect for black people. . . . For the past forty years, black families have trekked to schools in numerous districts throughout the country to say, 'This book is not good for our children' only to be turned away by insensitive and often unwittingly racist teachers and administrators who respond, 'This book is a classic.'"*

Margo Allen, in an article titled "*Huck Finn*: Two Generations of Pain" (*Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, 15, 1984), described her negative experiences with the book: "I need not tell you that I hated the book! Yet, while we read it, I pretended that it didn't bother me. I hid, from my teacher and my classmates, the tension, discomfort and hurt I would feel every time I heard that word or watched the class laugh at Jim. . . ."

Champions of the novel reply that it is a satire, a scathing attack on the hypocrisy and prejudice of a society that pretends to honor virtue while condoning slavery. Although state NAACP organizations have supported various protests against the book, the NAACP national headquarters' current position paper states:

> *You don't ban Mark Twain—you explain Mark Twain! To study an idea is not necessarily to endorse the idea. Mark Twain's satirical novel,* Huckleberry Finn, *accurately portrays a time in history—the nineteenth century—and one of its evils, slavery.*

'Raciqlly Offensive'

'Huck Finn' Dropped By New York Schools

NEW YORK (AP) — Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" has been dropped as a textbook in New York's elementary and junior high schools, apparently because of passages derogatory [illegible] out "prejudice to the book," she said.

But an official of one publishing firm said school authorities had informed him that his company's contract for the book was not renewed because the work contained passages derogatory to Negroes.

A contract with another publisher, supplying New York high schools with the book, expires in 1969.

Several organizations vocal in the civil liberties field, including the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People, said they had not protested about the book. However, a spokesman for the NAACP said the organization objected to "racial slurs" and "belittling racial designations" in Mark Twain" works.

"HUCKLEBERRY FINN."

Mark Twain's Last Book Excluded from a Public Library.

Special Dispatch to the Globe-Democrat.

CONCORD, Mass., March 16.—The Concord Public Library Committee has unanimously decided to exclude from the shelves of that institution Mark Twain's new book, "Huckleberry Finn." said one member of the committee: "While I do not wish to state it as my opinion that the book is absolutely immoral in its tone, still it seems to me that it contains but very little humor, and that little is of a very coarse type. If it were not for the author's reputation the book would undoubtedly meet with severe criticism. I regard it as the veriest trash." Another member says "I have examined the book and my objections to it are these: It deals with a series of adventures of a very low grade of morality; it is couched in the language of a rough, ignorant dialect, and all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions. It is also very irreverent. To sum up, the book is flippant and irreverent in its style. It deals with a series of experiences that are certainly not elevating. The whole book is of a class that is more profitable for the slums than it is for respectable people, and it is trash of the veriest sort."

which relates the [illegible] of a boy and his [illegible] ig the Mississippi may be on its way [illegible] book in New York [illegible]

el Huggard, asso- superintendent in curriculum devel- [illegible]ed yesterday ard of Education [illegible] renew three text- [illegible]cts for the book. however, that this [illegible]om objections to which is regarded Twain's grey [illegible]

gard said the book, [illegible]n 1885, was a text because it [illegible]d it was not ac- [illegible]book. Copies of [illegible]re still available; New York school [illegible]te said.

[illegible]ut Prejudice"

[illegible] of the book was [illegible] selection and with[illegible]

Not only is it not racist, says scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin, it is "the greatest anti-racist novel by an American writer." Through the story of a friendship between a white boy and a runaway slave who search for freedom together on a raft down the Mississippi River, Twain explores friendship, loyalty, morality, freedom, race, and America itself. With a "sound heart" triumphing over a "deformed conscience," Huck decides he'll "go to hell" rather than give his friend Jim up to slavery. As writer David Bradley says, "*Huckleberry Finn* should be taught because it is a seminal and central text in White American Literature. *Huckleberry Finn* should be taught because it is a seminal and central text in Black American Literature. *Huckleberry Finn* must be taught because it is a specific point of intersection between these two American Literatures."

MARK TWAIN BOOKS UNFIT FOR YOUTHS!

Thus Brooklyn Public Libraries Hold in Taking Action Against Two of Them.

The Brooklyn Public Libraries have issued an order withholding Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" from children considered by the library authorities to be under the age of discretion. The order against the two classics of boyhood went into effect two weeks ago. The library authorities after mature deliberation decided such works were likely to convince young minds of the futility of the Ten Commandments. Mr. Clemens was notified by letter.

The author's reply is said to be quite the finest piece of writing he has ever done, but unfortunately it is not for publication. The library authorities will not show it without Mr. Clemens's permission, and Mr. Clemens characteristically refuses to tell what it contains without permission from the library people. Frank P. Hill, the librarian in charge in Brooklyn, has the letter.

At Mr. Clemens's residence, No. 21 Fifth avenue, he sent down word yesterday that he was too ill to see any one. His secretary, however, with his sanction, said the letter formed part of a purely private correspondence. Simply, certain men connected with Brooklyn libraries had found passages in Mr. Clemens's books unsuitable, in their opinion, for assimilation by young minds. They had written Mr. Clemens and he had replied expressing his own opinion in his own way.

Accounts of the various controversies surrounding *Huck Finn*, from left to right: 1885, 1957, and 1905

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Controversy at Cherry Hill

Cherry Hill, New Jersey, is a middle-class community across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. A suburb that was nearly all white in the early 1980s, 20 percent of its population is now African American, Latino, or Asian. Cherry Hill, like many communities, has had to grapple with issues of how to integrate different cultures, and how to raise consciousness about the perspectives of minorities in a place where, until recently, so-called minority issues were only something to read about in the newspaper.

In 1995, several African American high school students in Cherry Hill complained to their parents about having to read *Huck Finn* in class. Before assigning it, some teachers had not mentioned that the book was controversial, nor had they noted the more than two hundred instances of the word "nigger" in the novel. As a result, according to one of the students, no one was prepared for the power of the word in class. White students would nervously "snicker" or "turn around and stare" at the handful of African American students when the word was read aloud.

The African American students felt too ashamed to speak up or ask their teachers for help; instead, they simply stopped reading or attending class. Their parents, long frustrated with the lack of multicultural content in the district's curricula, initially tried to solve the problem by working with the school on a newly established Multicultural Task Force. As part of this effort, a team of experts in history and literature from nearby Villanova University, assembled by Professor Maghan Keita and including Professors Larry Little and Crystal Lucky, were invited to conduct a workshop on *Huck Finn* for the teachers at Cherry Hill. But by the end of the 1995–96 school year, the parents still felt that not enough had been done to correct the problem. If nothing more changed, one parent recalls, "we knew we'd have a firestorm on our hands."

In November 1996, a group of parents from the Cherry Hill Minority Civic Association (CHMCA) presented a formal "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" to the Board of Education, claiming that "the prejudicial effect of the racial characterizations outweigh any literary value that the book might have." The Board of Education, acting on its policy to respond within thirty days, established a committee to review the complaint, chaired by Richard Levy, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, and including administrators, teachers, and board members. One of the committee's most important recommendations, says Levy, was that all parties sit down for a "frank dialogue."

But on the night in 1996 when parents and teachers first came together, neither side believed they'd ever find common ground. "The group of us and the teachers sat across from each other, diametrically opposed, and there was so much tension you could cut it with a knife," remembers Pat McCargo, corresponding secretary of the CHMCA at the time. Concerned about academic freedom, many teachers declared that they would never teach a book primarily as a "tool for political purposes" rather than as literature. If parents were allowed to dictate how to teach this book—or whether or not to teach it at all—the teachers asked, where would they draw the line? But as the parents rose to speak and told the teachers what their children hadn't been able to say in class—that reading *Huck Finn* made them feel conspicuous and ashamed—"we could actually see the teachers putting themselves in the kids' shoes," said one father. "What we found wasn't so much racism as misunderstanding," says Bill McCargo, president of the CHMCA. "At long last they finally understood."

For all the groups, the most important thing to come out of this meeting was an understanding that no one wanted to ban the book. "I got the feeling that people were saying instead, we want a solution," says teacher Sandy Forchion. "If we ban books, all we're doing is shoving the problem below the surface, and it's always going to be there," agrees Bill McCargo. There was also consensus that student learning was the first priority—beyond the philosophical questions of censorship and intellectual freedom. As parent Danny Elmore commented at the time, "If [students] shut down, we haven't done anything."

The process of negotiating a curriculum everyone could agree on took over a year, and during that time *Huck Finn* was taken out of the classroom. In the end, it was decided that not only would the curriculum be rewritten, but all Cherry Hill teachers wishing to teach the novel in the future would be required to

attend a one-day workshop given by the Villanova professors. At the workshop and within the new curriculum, teachers would be given the historical, cultural, and literary resources to see the novel in a new light.

On the night the committee presented its final report to the Board of Education, television cameras came from stations all over southern New Jersey. "They were expecting a big fight," recalls Levy. "What they found instead was a solution to a very challenging problem."

While not all teachers in Cherry Hill have signed on for the workshop (and thus have chosen not to teach the book), most people feel that the new curriculum is both rich and balanced. Although it is only in its first year of classroom use and is, teachers emphasize, a work "in progress," the curriculum seems already to have changed how students see not just *Huck Finn*, but issues of race in general. "Racism was always part of the conversation [throughout the new curriculum]," says one eleventh grader, "[and] until this unit I didn't really realize how much racism continues today."

Everyone at Cherry Hill agrees that the controversy brought their community together. The strengthened relationship between the minority community and the schools is "one of the best things that came out of this," says the same parent who worried at first that there would be a "firestorm."

"When I look back at my career, this is right up at the top," says Levy. "We worked through the controversy and came to a resolution that's a win-win for everyone."

Cherry Hill finds new way to teach 'Huckleberry Finn'

By Stephanie Brenowitz
INQUIRER CORRESPONDENT

CHERRY HILL — What has ended up a shouting match or a lawsuit in school districts nationwide became a moment of racial healing in Cherry Hill last night as the school board unanimously voted to include *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in next semester's curriculum.

A year ago, members of the Minority Civic Association told the board that African American students were embarrassed and hurt by the book's depiction of black characters and use of racial epithets. They wanted the board to consider removing the book from the curriculum, as districts in Upper Dublin, Pa., and Texas and Arizona had done.

But last night, black and white parents applauded the new lesson plan that will teach high school juniors the controversial Mark Twain novel in a six-week unit that addresses slavery, racism and even the controversy itself.

Last night, Danny Elmore, vice president of the civic association, told the board that when his group made its complaints last November, "we believed that the prejudicial effect of how blacks were depicted in the book outweighed its literary value. You thoughtfully listened to those concerns ... and could have yanked the book after the comments.

"But instead, you took the book and made into a positive a thing, a learning tool," Elmore continued. "I want to congratulate the board on what we believe is a monumental step."

The new curriculum was developed by teachers and administrators after a committee including board and community members discussed the book. It will include other writings by African American writers, such as former slave Frederick Douglass and modern poets Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes.

The classes also will discuss why the book makes some African Americans uncomfortable, as a way to open a meaningful dialogue on race, said Assistant Superintendent Dick Levy.

Many parents spoke of their support of the board's unusual approach.

"As the parent of two adopted African American children, I have become intensely aware of how incredibly entrenched [prejudicial] attitudes are," Anne Mays told the board. "I am thrilled to see that the school district has tackled this issue head on."

The Philadelphia Inquirer, December 16, 1997

Perspectives from Cherry Hill

Introduction

All four groups—parents, teachers, administrators, and students—agreed they were committed to finding a way to avoid banning the book. Each group also agreed that only one method really works in bringing different groups to consensus: "Keep talking, and keep bringing everyone together," as Richard Levy puts it. What is most striking about the Cherry Hill story is the degree of mutual understanding the various groups ultimately developed, as well as the warmth and respect with which the groups came to regard one another.

Administration

The most sensitive and important role administrators play is ensuring that the needs of all parties are addressed, balanced, and, as much as possible, met. For this reason, says Richard Levy, early on "we decided to have all parties come together to share their stories, issues, and concerns. We knew there could be a clash, but the community had to talk through this issue of banning." Although they strongly believed that no parent should be able to dictate the school's reading list, administrators were very concerned about how African American students felt in the classroom. They were also sympathetic to teachers, and well aware that some might perceive this challenge as being told what or how to teach. "Teachers will . . . be concerned about their intellectual freedom, about where the line is drawn," notes Lesley Solomon, Curriculum Coordinator.

In order to have the widest possible range of viewpoints, Levy expanded the committee convened to review the challenge from the mandated five people to seven so that more African Americans could be included. In the end, the committee, chaired by Levy, went through five drafts of the curriculum before they settled on the response presented to the Board of Education in December 1997.

Advice

- Develop policies that ensure that students are provided with a wide range of instructional materials.
- Have a mandated policy in place for dealing with challenges to any instructional materials, not only so that everyone is treated the same way, but so that there is a "cooling-off period" after the challenge is brought.
- Take the issue and put it in a broader context. Raise the level of the discussion so that, as Levy puts it, "it's not just 'this book or not this book.'" Instead, make sure everyone realizes it is also about issues of censorship, the rights of parents and students, and the academic freedom of teachers.
- Gather research and other points of view from dispassionate observers who can speak to all participants. In Cherry Hill, administrators assembled a range of reading materials about *Huck Finn* during the review of the formal challenge. Later, professors from Villanova were invited to participate.
- Be proactive with the media. Call and explain what you are trying to do before you do it, to keep everyone in the community informed. "If you have an acrimonious complaint voiced directly to the press from one of the participants, you're going to sound defensive reacting to it if you're not careful," notes Laurie Zellnik, Public Information Officer for the Cherry Hill district.
- Invite a wide range and large number of people into the discussion. Facilitate meetings and conversations among the different groups as often and for as long as you must to help everyone understand everyone else's point of view.
- Support teachers by providing background on cultural groups they are teaching with which they may not have much familiarity.
- Be careful of making mandatory "anything that smacks of 'sensitivity training,'" says Solomon, "since that implies that teachers are not sensitive."
- Let everyone see their ideas in the final product. Although two classroom teachers wrote the final curriculum, the parents' group was satisfied that it directly addressed their concerns.

Cherry Hill Minority Civic Association

(CHMCA)

The purpose of the CHMCA is to advocate for the minority community in Cherry Hill, especially for the children. The group had already been concerned about how minorities were treated in Cherry Hill. So when a group of students, including Bill and Pat McCargo's daughter, objected to the way *Huck Finn* was taught in their eleventh grade class, the CHMCA felt something had to be done.

The CHMCA worried, however, that even after a formal complaint, nothing substantial would happen. They decided that, if there was no compromise, "we had no recourse but to ask them to pull the book," remembers Pat McCargo. This decision sparked a heated internal debate between those who believed books should never be banned and those who saw banning as a viable last resort. Once the CHMCA met with the other groups, though, it quickly became obvious that banning *Huck Finn* wouldn't be necessary.

Advice

- Make sure you know what's going on in your children's classrooms. Get to know the administration of the school so that if you need to question something, you can do so in the context of a prior relationship.
- Realize that some teachers will initially respond, "Parents cannot tell us how to teach." Emphasize that you simply want your concerns addressed but that you are not going to try to rewrite their curriculum for them.
- Read or reread the book, curriculum, or other material you are objecting to so you see the problem in context.
- Be firm. Outline your concerns, be clear about what has not been done in the past, and ask that your issues be addressed now.
- Stay open-minded. As Bill McCargo notes, "True communication gets you from resistance to support." Bring everyone together and let them speak their minds. "After that first meeting," remembers McCargo, "parents left realizing, 'Oh yeah, it's not such a great idea to ban books' and teachers left saying, 'I had no idea the kids felt *that* bad.'"
- Talk about *everything*. Danny Elmore, Vice President of the CHMCA at the time, noted that in the committee's discussion, everyone avoided dealing with the word "nigger" by saying instead, "that word." I said, "No, let's talk about it—not 'that word' but 'nigger.' Then I read a passage where it was used about thirty times." The power of the word seemed to make the parents' concerns clear to everyone. "I think we all left that meeting feeling like we were finally going to get something done," says Elmore.
- If they are not already invited, ask to have experts or other objective outsiders brought in to give their perspectives.

Sandy Forchion, Cherry Hill East

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Teachers

For many teachers, the key issue concerning challenged material is about academic freedom. Roland LaVoie is a teacher at the Cherry Hill East High School who, though he finds the new curriculum "brilliant" in the way it balances the concerns of all parties, has chosen not to attend the workshop (and thus not to teach the book). "If we take away the English teacher's ability to apply judgment to a work of literature, we're just delivery machines . . . we might as well be on videotape," he explains.

Some of the teachers who eventually wrote and/or taught the new curriculum sympathize with this point of view, but Sandy Forchion, a Cherry Hill East High School English teacher and the co-writer of the new curriculum, says that, "For me it's hard to understand those teachers who don't want to change even after kids come to you and say they're hurt and want to stay out of class. How can you not find a way to address that?" Other teachers felt strongly enough about *Huck Finn* remaining in the high school curriculum to try the new curriculum. "I'd rather change my approach to a novel than lose the right to teach it," says Marge Kraemer, an English teacher at Cherry Hill West High School.

The challenge for the writers of the final curriculum, Sandy Forchion and Matthew Carr (also an English teacher at Cherry Hill East), was to balance the interests of all the groups while creating something that would remain true to the meaning of the novel. For Carr, it was important to discover that this challenge to *Huck Finn* was "not just some current, 'PC' thing" but an issue that had been raised continuously over the last forty years. Forchion's position was unique: "I was a black English teacher who was against censorship, but who had despised the way *Huck Finn* was taught to me when I was in school."

Advice

- Know your school or district's policy on handling challenges, and make sure it is followed correctly.
- Keep an open mind. Show parents, says Forchion, that "they're dealing with people who can see both sides."
- Be an advocate for your colleagues at every step of the process. "Keep asking yourself, how will this feel to teachers in the classroom?" says Carr.
- Develop the curriculum so that teachers have a great deal of choice and flexibility.

Mark Twain, 1901

Professors

The main goal of the three Villanova University professors, says Crystal Lucky, Professor of African American Literature, was to empower the teachers. "There is a tendency for teachers to bypass what's going to be uncomfortable," she says. "The kids are going to talk about [these controversial subjects] outside class, and they'll [sense] a teacher's fear and uncertainty if he or she is not ready to teach something." But, as African American educators and as parents, "[we] also wanted the parents to feel someone listened to them," Lucky says.

Advice

- Be prepared for some resistance from teachers. As Maghan Keita, Professor of African History, says, a professor may initially be seen as "some pointy-head coming in here to tell me [the teacher] how to do my job." Try to break down this resistance by getting teachers involved in the training.
- Emphasize to teachers that by approaching a book in its historical and cultural context they won't have to take a book out of the curriculum.
- Openly confront controversial issues in the classroom. Diffuse sensitive subjects by discussing them as intellectual issues so that students can learn to think about them unemotionally in class. For instance, the new *Huck Finn* curriculum tackles the use of "nigger" and racism in general in the first few lessons, before the book is even read.
- Give teachers more resources and strategies "than they can ever possibly use," suggests Lawrence Little, Professor of African American History, so that they have a great deal of choice, and so that they are not overwhelmed by the idea that a new curriculum means hours of preparatory work.

Students

Students helped shape the new curriculum by speaking out at the early meetings. Their role now is to help teachers evaluate the success of the curriculum as it is taught. Although some students complained that the controversy seemed overblown in the first place ("We don't get enough credit for understanding things—we could have read it without all of this"), many seemed to appreciate the richer context of the new curriculum. "This stuff [racism] is all over the news. We can't avoid it. . . . We already learn it outside of school, why not study it in school and get the real facts?" observed one student who had just finished reading *Huck Finn* with the new curriculum. Another student commented, "I think the impact of this book is in the discomfort the readers feel. . . . *Huck Finn* is perfect to read if it's taught correctly."

Advice

- Look at classroom discussions about topics such as race and culture as an opportunity to open others' minds and broaden their knowledge about your own culture, whatever it is. If someone says something that offends you, however, speak up. Dawn McCargo, one of the original student complainants, says, "Don't sit and be quiet. Kids can interact with their teachers these days, so it's our responsibility to bring up that we're uncomfortable—then it's the teacher's responsibility to address that."
- Don't feel you have to speak for all members of your racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural group; speak only for yourself, and make clear that's all you can do if the class or teacher seems to assume otherwise.
- Keep an open mind when reading a book that at first might appear racist or otherwise offensive. "That might not be what the book is saying, so try to get past it," McCargo says.

"I think the impact of this book is in the discomfort the readers feel. . . . *Huck Finn* is perfect to read if it's taught correctly."

Student, Cherry Hill East High School

"I'd rather change my approach to a novel than lose the right to teach it."

Marge Kraemer, English teacher, Cherry Hill West High School

"Keep asking yourself, how will this feel to teachers in the classroom?"

Matthew Carr, English teacher, Cherry Hill East High School

"Keep talking, and keep bringing everyone together."

Richard Levy, Administration, Cherry Hill Schools

"True communication gets you from resistance to support."

Bill McCargo, parent, CHMCA

Creating the Curriculum

The Cherry Hill Curriculum

The Cherry Hill curriculum was developed primarily by English teachers Matthew Carr and Sandy Forchion. They worked throughout the summer of 1997 to address the issues raised by the challenge, using the resources suggested by the Villanova professors as well as their own sense of what would work best in a high school classroom.

For the most part, the concerns of the Cherry Hill parents echoed the concerns of many other African American parents who have questioned the book's place in the high school classroom: chiefly, the repeated use of the word "nigger," and the fear that the portrayal of blacks in the book is too stereotyped. "We tried to translate the parents' concerns into our curriculum," says Forchion. "We looked for the demeaning areas, places where students might find the portrayal of blacks laughable." They then examined the satirical nature of the portrayals, as well as supplying other African American views and voices that would give students a more complete understanding of the literary and cultural context.

Cherry Hill parents had two additional worries. First, they feared that, for most students in the district, the only time they would study African American history in depth would be through slavery. Danny Elmore explains, "We wanted kids to see blacks as a proud people before slavery—as the kings and queens of Africa. If you lead up to *Huck Finn* with this, by the time you read it, you have enough background that the book doesn't slap you in the face." The Cherry Hill Curriculum suggests a lesson in Section II on African history and the Middle Passage. Due to space limitations, we have mentioned the topic but have not included a full lesson plan. Since history is important throughout the curriculum, there are many opportunities for interdisciplinary or team teaching.

The Cherry Hill parents were also concerned that Jim would never seem like a true hero to African American children because he does not resist slavery. As Forchion notes, "Jim is not heroic to black kids. In the end he is being controlled by a white boy. He is not a man, he is an emasculated man. They [the students] want to see Nat Turner." The curriculum is therefore structured so that students spend at least a day looking at forms of resistance and considering the idea that "wearing a mask," as Jim does, is a valid form of rebellion. They also read slave narratives such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* to understand other kinds of resistance.

Professor Larry Little points out that there are always two problems when teaching about slavery. The first is that "[African American] kids are ashamed this is their history. Jewish kids sometimes have the same problem: shame at being a victim. To counteract this, we try to give teachers strategies to work around these problems," such as looking more closely at the ways slaves resisted.

The second problem is the perception on the part of some African American students that, "You're white, you can't tell me anything about this." Teachers might be understandably hesitant to take on a curriculum that begins with lessons on the word "nigger" and considers racism in general, so Section I of the curriculum offers effective ways of approaching this difficult issue.

Although the issues and sensitivities regarding the book may change depending on the demographics of the class (and who is teaching it), it's important that all students—whether in a racially mixed or homogeneous classroom—are provided with the kind of curriculum that will help them see the book in a larger context.

Using the "*Huck Finn* in Context" Curriculum

WGBH's adaptation of the Cherry Hill curriculum uses the same structure and most of the same readings. We have included additional discussion questions, activities, and readings. We felt that some of the topics in the original curriculum, such as the culture of West Africa or the role of religion and superstition, were too complex to adequately present in this format. We have mentioned these within the appropriate sections as suggestions for further development. You can also use the extensive bibliography and lists of Web sites and organizations (see pages 34–38) to enhance your lesson plans.

Watching the film "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" is an ideal way to engage students in the book and the controversy. You may want to show the film in its entirety during Section I or you may want to select portions of it to show throughout the entire *Huck Finn* unit. The detailed index to the film on pages 32–33 will help you plan segments for viewing. (See page 39 for ordering the *Huck Finn Coursepack*, which contains a complete set of the companion readings, plus the "Born to Trouble" video.) As you would with any film, be sure to preview it before you use it.

YOU MAY ALSO WANT to use the PBS film series *Africans in America* in conjunction with the "*Huck Finn* in Context" curriculum, especially during Sections I and II. This four-part series traces the history of slavery in America and explores many of the themes and topics discussed in these two sections, such as African heritage, stereotypes, resistance and rebellion, and the historical roots of racism. The *Africans in America* Web site (www.pbs.org/africansinamerica) also contains valuable primary sources and lessons. See page 39 for ordering information.

Wood engraving by Harry Brockway for *Huckleberry Finn*, 1993 (©1993 The Folio Society, Ltd., London)

Section 1:
Exploring the Controversy

Suggested length: 2–7 days

This unit is central to a study of *Huck Finn*. It gives necessary background before students begin reading the book so they are prepared for the racial issues they will encounter. It poses questions about issues such as racism, censorship, and intellectual freedom. And, because it connects to contemporary issues, it will help motivate students to become engaged in the material.

At this time you may also want to introduce students to biographical information about Mark Twain, and provide additional historical information about post–Reconstruction America as well as the turbulent 1840s in Missouri, where the story takes place. A good source for historical background is Chapter Four in Shelley Fisher Fishkin's book, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also General Resources, pages 34–38, for Web sites and the bibliography.

Mark Twain

Assigning the Novel

You may choose to assign *Huck Finn* according to your classroom schedule and needs. This curriculum is designed so that Sections I and II can be used for pre-reading activities, or you can have students read *Huck Finn* in its entirety during Sections I and II, and then bring the finished book to class. By the beginning of Section III, however, students should have completed the book. The companion readings* provide important background and other content.

*All companion readings are available in the *Huck Finn Coursepack*. See page 39.

The Controversy

Companion Readings for Teachers

Henry, Peaches. "The Struggle for Tolerance: Race and Censorship in *Huck Finn*." In *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, edited by James Leonard et al., Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992, 25–48.

Jordan, Winthrop. "First Impressions." In *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 3–25.

Powell, Thomas. "The Subject of Racism." In *The Persistence of Racism in America*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992, 1–5.

Companion Readings for Students

"Unfit for Children: Censorship and Race." In *Understanding Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents* by Claudia Durst Johnson. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996, 29–45. Additional selections from this book may also be useful.

For supplemental reading, you may also want to use Nat Hentoff's young adult novel *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book* (New York: Bantam, 1982), which is about one school's attempt to ban *Huck Finn*.

Discussion Questions

- Why is the teaching and reading of *Huck Finn* so controversial?
- How have the criticisms about the book changed over the years?
- How do these various criticisms reflect a changing America?
- How does knowing about the history of the controversy make you feel about reading the book?
- Under what circumstances, if any, do you think a book should be taken off a school's reading list and/or out of its library?

Activities

- Using the film, the library, and the Web, have students construct a timeline that shows the different challenges *Huck Finn* has faced since it was published. For each challenge, the timeline might include quotes from detractors, as well as responses from the book's defenders.
- Using the film and/or additional research, have students choose one of the challenges made against the book and design a poster to express that point of view—for instance, a poster that could have been created by the Brooklyn Public Library in 1907 warning parents not to let children read the book. Remind students that they don't have to agree with the point of view they portray, just convey it accurately. Ask students to present their posters and explain the challenge they have represented.
- Have students research a current arts controversy through newspaper and magazine articles, as well as the Internet. Throughout the unit, have them keep a compare-and-contrast journal between that current controversy and *Huck Finn*. They might consider how political, cultural, historical, and other factors play a role in the two controversies. At the end of the unit, have them present a comparison in the form of an essay, chart, dialogue, or collage.

- Have students investigate the historical and societal factors surrounding the novel, such as West African civilization, the Middle Passage, slave religion, abolition, and Reconstruction and its aftermath. Ask students to work in small groups and, using the General Resources (see pages 34–38) as well as other resources, have each group choose a research topic. Each group can present their findings as part of Section I or as an ongoing report throughout the *Huck Finn* unit. Be sure that the students explain how their topic is connected to the novel.

On Racism

Racism is obviously a complex and difficult subject. Although teachers may feel uncomfortable discussing the topic, it is key to appreciating and understanding *Huck Finn*. Use the discussion questions and readings below to help students begin to think about the issue and how it relates to charges that the book is racist. You may want to create a K-W-L (**K**now-**W**ant to Know-**L**earned) chart that the class updates throughout the reading of the book. As their understanding of the issues deepens, students can use the chart to reexamine their thinking.

To begin the dialogue, have the class try to establish a definition of racism. Use the discussion questions and activities on page 19 to introduce the use of the word "nigger" in the book, as well as for teaching tips on handling sensitive issues. (Although stereotypes are discussed in the next section, you may want to preview the topic by introducing it here.) Students can then tackle the discussion questions below as a whole class, in small groups, as journal topics, or through personal response essays that could be shared in a read-around.

To look at the historical roots of racism, have students read and discuss Winthrop Jordan's "First Impressions" (see Companion Readings), which describes the reaction of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English travelers to West Africans. Using the class definition of racism, would the English voyagers be considered racist? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions

- What is racism? Is it a belief? Is it an action?
- What causes racism? What beliefs do people invoke to try to justify racism? In what kinds of situations do we see or find racism?
- When did you first recognize your own racial, ethnic, religious (or other) identity? What does it mean to you to identify yourself in this way? What do you like most and least about being a member of your group?
- How has racism affected you or people you know?*
- Do you think most minorities have a positive or negative image of whites? Do you think most whites have a positive or negative image of other races?*
- What's the biggest misconception blacks have about whites? Whites about blacks?*

* Source: *Teaching Tolerance*, Spring 1993, 58–63.

Activity

- In order to look critically at the *Huck Finn* controversy and give their own opinion of it, have students gather evidence of whether or not *Huck Finn* is racist as they read the novel. For example, students should be directed to pay particular attention to when the word "nigger" is used, who uses it, and how. See page 28 for a final project based on this activity.

OTHER CURRICULUMS AND TRAININGS tackle the subject of racism and the "n" word, such as "The Shadow of Hate" curriculum from Teaching Tolerance and the ***Anti-Bias Study Guide*** developed by the Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference® Institute. Contact these sources for more information (see page 35 for organizations). The following books may also be helpful:

- ***Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K–12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education,*** edited by Enid Lee, Deborah Menkart, and Margo Okazawa-Rey (Washington, D.C.: Network of Educators on the Americas, 1998).
- ***Teaching for a Tolerant World, Grades 9–12***, edited by Carol Danks and Leatrice Rabinsky (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999).
- ***Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach*** by Louise Derman-Sparks and C.B. Phillips (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

For background and discussion, you may want to choose selections from books such as *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Tatum (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). Two articles written by young people that may be useful are "The 'N' Word: It Just Slips Out" by Allen Francis and "That Black Girl" by Carmen R. Thompson (see Bibliography, pages 36–38).

The "N" Word

> *Nigger (also spelled niggar): a word that is an alteration of the earlier neger, nigger derives from the French negre, from the Spanish and Portuguese negro, from the Latin niger (black). First recorded in 1587 (as negar), the word probably originated with the dialectal pronunciation of negro in northern England and Ireland.*
>
> —*Anti-Bias Study Guide*, Anti-Defamation League, 1998

In the United States, "nigger" was first regarded as pejorative in the early nineteenth century. In the era of enslavement, the words "nigger" or "black" were inserted in front of a common American first name (e.g., John), given to a slave to distinguish the slave from any local white person with the same name. While usage of the word in African American culture is complex in that it can be used affectionately, politically, or pejoratively, the epithet is considered an abusive slur when used by white people. Langston Hughes in *The Big Sea* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1940) offered an eloquent commentary:

> *Used rightly or wrongly, ironically or seriously, of necessity for the sake of realism, or impishly for the sake of comedy, it doesn't matter. Negroes do not like it in any book or play whatsoever, be the book or play ever so sympathetic in its treatment of the basic problems of the race. Even though the book or play is written by a Negro, they still do not like it. The word nigger, you see, sums up for us who are colored all the bitter years of insult and struggle in America.*

The word has gained more acceptance in recent years in youth culture through song lyrics and stand-up comedy. Some claim that the word can be defused through reclaiming it. However, most adults continue to view the word as offensive and harmful.

In the Classroom

Whether in the context of *Huck Finn* or in any other text in which the word is used, "nigger" raises a number of concerns for both teachers and students when it is used in a classroom setting. When the issues surrounding the word have not been previously addressed in the classroom, it "changes everything," according to parent Danny Elmore. "Five seconds before that word is used, everyone in class might have been your friend. But now you're reassessing yourself, and they're reassessing you. It has a profound effect. Nothing is the same after it is used."

The feelings and reaction of students may depend on the demographics of the student population. In schools that are predominantly African American, students may feel more comfortable with the word, although not necessarily with its repeated use by white characters in a "classic" text. When African American students are in the minority, however, they often feel embarrassed and singled out. Said one African American student in Cherry Hill, "Every time the word came up [during oral reading], everybody turned around to look at me." It's equally important, however, to address the issue regardless of whether the class is racially mixed or homogeneous.

Different teachers handle the word in different ways. Some never use it, and will not allow students to use it. Instead, they skip over it or use a euphemism such as "the 'n' word." Here again race can be a factor. A white teacher, for instance, may be far more reluctant to use the word than a teacher of color, regardless of the class demographics. Nancy Methelis, the English teacher at Boston Latin School featured in the film "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," explains her decision not to use the word aloud in class:

> *Words are among the most powerful things there are. . . . A grown-up, middle-aged white woman using that word gives another level of meaning than a 15-year-old African American student. I think I could hurt students by using it, and I don't feel that my minority students want to hear their white peers use that word either. . . . And if it turns out we're sacrificing a little academic rigor in the service of not adding to anyone's pain, maybe that's okay. . . .*

In the film one of Methelis's students, Shantae, adds, "I hear it every day in school, but I just . . . kind of like the fact that [she] didn't use it in class." Chrissy Hayes, an African American student at Cherry Hill East High School, acknowledges that the word is problematic: "There's no way to completely ease the tension when they keep saying 'nigger, nigger, nigger' and you're the only one in the room it could apply to. But even if teachers say 'the n word' instead, it's written right there in the book, and everyone still reads it in their minds."

Kathy Monteiro, the mother in the film who wanted the book removed from the school's required reading list, says, "How can you ask kids to go home and read the word 'nigger' two hundred-something times in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and then expect kids to come back to school and not use the word?"

In deciding how to handle the word, consider how its use in the classroom—reading it aloud or as part of assigned silent reading—will affect students. Some educators believe that the word should be said and discussed openly. Professor Maghan Keita says, "Within the framework of the text, if you don't understand how that word can be used, that it's satire [in the case of *Huck Finn*]—if you don't teach that, you've missed a teaching moment. Our task is to prepare students to think so that when confronted with these words in a text they can see what the author's intent is. What is the meaning of it in *this* text?"

Writer David Bradley agrees. "We cannot avoid being hurt. Language hurts people, reality hurts people. . . . If the word 'nigger' did not have meaning today we wouldn't care that it was in [*Huck Finn*]. The hurt is that it still does have meaning. . . . People sometimes think the book causes things. It only causes things if there are things there that are waiting to happen. If I go into a school or talk to a school administrator who says, well, gee, this book is going to cause all kinds of trouble, I'm going to say, you've already got trouble."

Discussion Questions

Students may be shocked to hear "the 'N' word" used openly in the classroom. Prepare the class by explaining they are about to study a book that contains a pejorative term. To frame the discussion and to empower students to feel free to speak their thoughts and opinions, you may want to begin with a key question such as, "*Huck Finn* and many other works of literature contain the word 'nigger.' How should we deal with this in the classroom?" Emphasize that exploring the meaning and use of the word does not mean an acceptance or approval of the word. Use the following questions to help foster classroom discussion. You may also want to expand this discussion to explore the power of words when used as epithets.

- In general, who can or can't say the word? When, if ever, can it be said?
- How do you feel about the use of the word?
- Is the use of the word in the classroom different from its use outside the classroom?
- Is it different to read a text by an African American who uses it than it is to read it in a text by a non-African American? Why or why not?
- Does the use of the word in a "classic" literary work give it validity outside of the classroom? If so, how?

Teaching Tips

Some teachers may feel apprehensive about exploring racism and related issues. The following suggestions will help teachers deal with these or other emotionally charged issues. You may also want to inform parents in advance about how you will be approaching the use of the word in the classroom and in the book.

- Never assume of your students either 1) complete ignorance of and disdain for discussing race relations and cultural differences, or 2) complete awareness of and extreme willingness to discuss and better understand race relations and cultural differences.*
- You may want to ask the group to decide the format for discussion of these issues. (Anything said in the discussion session should not affect grades.) Depending on the demographics of your classroom, you may want to speak privately with African American (or other students as needed) before beginning the unit.*
- Set ground rules for the discussion, such as no name-calling, no put downs, and respect for all viewpoints. Do not press for a resolution of friction that may occur during the discussion of these issues. Students should be responsible for their words and actions.*
- No one individual or group should be expected to be spokespersons for their race, gender, socioeconomic group, political affiliation, or any other group.*
- Invite outside experts or community leaders to give other perspectives.
- Be honest with students about your own feelings, and explain to them why you want to explore the subject.
- If the class is initially hesitant to talk, try having students express their feelings through journal entries, free writing, or anonymous responses.

* Adapted from *Fires in the Mirror: Essays and Teaching Strategies*, WGBH, 1993.

Activities

- Using readings that talk about the word "nigger"—such as "Incident" by Countee Cullen (found in many poetry anthologies)—can be an effective way for teachers to initiate discussion. Ask students how the word changes the poem, and how the sing-song rhythm of the poem is an ironic contrast to its overall meaning. Students might go further by writing their own version of the poem in which they tell a story of a time someone insulted them, whether with this word or another word, phrase, or gesture, and how it felt. Have students read "The 'N' Word: It Just Slips Out" by Francis Allen (see Bibliography, pages 36–38). Afterward, students can write a letter to the author telling him their thoughts on his essay, relating their own experiences, or questioning Allen's feelings about the use of the word in *Huck Finn*.

Section II:
Behind the Mask—Exploring Stereotypes

Suggested length: 2–7 days

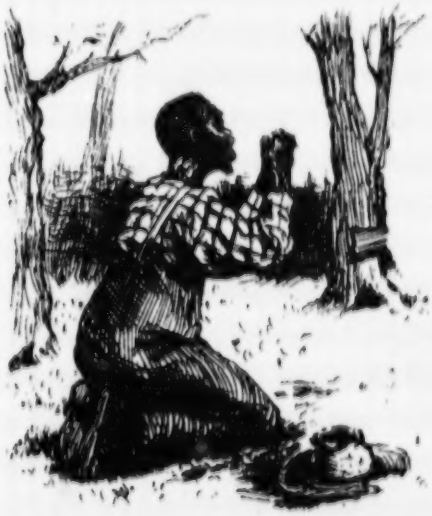
One of the major criticisms of *Huck Finn* has been that the character Jim is only a racist stereotype and that students will come away from the book with an image of him—and African Americans in general—as silly, superstitious, obedient, and passive. In this section, students define what a stereotype is, and look at the historical roots of African American plantation stereotypes, such as "Sambo," "Nat," and "Mammy." Referring back to Jordan's "First Impressions" can elucidate the earliest sources of African stereotypes, while the correspondence of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Banneker will help students understand the attitudes of white society toward slaves.

Poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes will help students go "behind the mask" of stereotypes. These selections offer opportunities to discuss how the "mask" can also be a form of resistance. You may also want to use Chapter 5 of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), in which the author sees that "the mask" can be a powerful weapon.

Students (and parents) may feel that identifying and discussing stereotypes only serves to reinforce them. It's important to clarify that the goal of Section II is to recognize the historical roots as well as contemporary manifestations of stereotypes and therefore more critically examine how Twain uses those stereotypes in *Huck Finn*. In addition to the readings listed below, you may find helpful background information in Donald Bogle's book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1998) and Joseph Boskin's *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

BEFORE EXAMINING negative African American stereotypes, it's useful to help students develop a deeper understanding of the history and culture of African Americans by looking at the rich and varied heritage of Africans before they were enslaved and brought to America, as well as during slavery. The original Cherry Hill curriculum briefly covered the culture of West Africa and information about the Middle Passage. You may want to assess students' prior knowledge on these subjects, and confer or team up with a history teacher to develop a lesson plan that provides adequate background knowledge. Two sources to consult are *African American Literature* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1992), an anthology and textbook containing overviews and excerpts, and *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* by John W. Blassingame (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). See also Bibliography, pages 36–38, for other suggested books.

Illustrations by E.W. Kemble, from the first American edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Some people find Kemble's portrayal of Jim as stereotypical and demeaning, thus adding to the controversy surrounding the book.



Stereotypes

Companion Readings for Teachers and Students

Note: The poems listed below can be found in various anthologies.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "We Wear the Mask." In *Crossing the Danger Water: Three Hundred Years of African-American Writing*, edited by Deirdre Mullane. New York: Doubleday, 1993, 350.

Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. "Slave Women." In *Slavery in American Society*, edited by Lawrence Goodheart. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1993, 166–169.

Hughes, Langston. "Minstrel Man." In *Children of Promise: African-American Literature and Art for Young People*, edited by Charles Sullivan. New York: Harry A. Abrams Publishers, 1991, 36.

Jordan, Winthrop. "First Impressions." In *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, 3–25.

Discussion Questions

- What are stereotypes? Why and how are they formed? Have students form a working definition of the word "stereotype" as they did with "racism" in Section I.
- How were stereotypes used to justify slavery? To reassure slave owners?
- Why might slaves themselves have reinforced stereotypes?

THE DOCUMENTARY "Ethnic Notions," produced and directed by Marlon Riggs (1987), traces the development of stereotypes and the roots of racism in America. It has been used in secondary schools and universities to explore these issues and may be useful in conjunction with this section. It is available in many libraries and through various distributors, including California Newsreel, 415-621-6196, or HR Press, 800-444-7139.

- How have slave stereotypes influenced portrayals of African Americans today?
- What do the Hughes and Dunbar poems express?
- What are some "masks" that oppressed groups use? What is the function of such a mask? How can masks be used as a form of resistance?

Historical Roots

Companion Readings for Teachers and Students

"Foreword," "Introduction," and "A Founding Father's View on Race." In *African Americans Opposing Viewpoints*, edited by William Dudley. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1997, 9–34.

Discussion Questions

- Using Winthrop Jordan's "First Impressions" selection, have the class list as many stereotypes as they can and discuss their origins. What were they based on?
- What was Jefferson's view on African Americans? How did he use slave stereotypes to make the argument that blacks are inferior?
- Before reading Banneker's reply, ask students how Banneker, a free, self-educated, and noted black scientist, might have responded. Ask students to imagine what he might have written. As they read Banneker's actual letter, have students note similarities and differences between what they predicted and what Banneker wrote.
- Revisit the students' earlier exploration of contemporary stereotypes. How have the stereotypes described in Jordan's "First Impressions" and in Jefferson's writings endured?

Activities

- Show students some of the illustrations from the original *Huck Finn* (see facing page). Ask students to discuss or write about why these illustrations may now be seen as offensive, what stereotypes they reflect, and what effect they might have had on the reader when it was published. How would they affect your reading now? How does the text of the book challenge or undermine the stereotypes in the illustrations?
- Ask students to consider portrayals of African Americans in movies, television, and advertising today. What are the common stereotypes? How are these stereotypes related to the slave stereotypes? Have new stereotypes arisen as well? Have students research the topic through books, magazine articles, and the Internet. Then have them write a letter to the editor, draw a political cartoon, or create a pictorial collage that details what they found and their opinion of it.
- After reading the Dunbar and Hughes poems, ask students to explain how the poems reflect or reveal the "mask" in an essay or drawing. You may also have students read and dramatize the poems by dividing the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the poems and give them twenty to thirty minutes to find a way to read the poem so that its meaning—whatever their interpretation—is clear to the rest of the class. Students may not add words, but they can rearrange or repeat words or phrases. After the presentations, bring the class together to talk about the similarities and differences in the portrayals.

Section III:
The Development of Character in *Huck Finn*

Suggested length: 7—10 days

The conventional approach to teaching *Huck Finn* assumes that Huck is the hero and center of the story and considers Jim only in relation to Huck and his moral growth. In Section III students are asked to consider a new paradigm. Professor Maghan Keita explains,

> *"I ask people to do a juxtaposition when confronting Jim. Take for a moment the notion that Huck is* not *the central character, but Jim is. How does this change notions of what this book is about? How is it that he—a slave and a 'nigger'—represents all the best qualities in the book, and how does he humanize Huck? How can Huck rise to heroic proportions without Jim? Jim teaches him how to be a hero."*

In discussing the book's climax, you may want to explore the idea that the climax comes when Huck apologizes to Jim.

This section asks students to examine who Jim and Huck are and how they change one another. It employs the kind of character analysis—the concept of the hero the struggle for identity—that will be familiar to English teachers, and asks students to take what they have learned about stereotypes and apply them to the portrayal of Jim. Toni Morrison's contemplation of Jim's character also helps spotlight the issues surrounding the book as a whole.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND the environment in which Jim and Huck lived, students may need background information on the 1840s, particularly the slavery conflict that would eventually lead to the Civil War. To provide an overview of the period, you may want to use young adult history books such as ***Days of Sorrow, Years of Glory 1831–1850*** (Milestones in Black American History series) by Timothy J. Paulson (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1994) or ***Let My People Go: African Americans 1804–1860*** (Young Oxford History of African Americans series) by Deborah White (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Companion Reading for Teachers and Students

Note: You may also want to use additional essays from these sources.

Cox, James M. "A Hard Book to Take." In *Modern Critical Interpretations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, 87–108.

Morrison, Toni. "Introduction." In *The Oxford Mark Twain*, edited by Shelley Fisher Fishkin. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Smith, David L. "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse." In *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, edited by James Leonard et al. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992, 103–120.

Discussion Questions

- What is your first reaction to Jim? How do you feel about him by the end of the novel? Why?
- To what extent is Jim a stereotype? When and how does he break free of stereotypical roles?
- Compare Pap's treatment of Huck with Jim's treatment of Huck and of his own daughter.
- What is your reaction to Huck at first? How do you feel about him by the end of the novel? Why?
- What determines who we are—nature (inborn traits) or nurture (environment)? How do you think Jim and Huck were shaped by these factors?
- Have students reread the passage in Chapter 31 of *Huck Finn* in which Huck talks about the conflict between what his heart tells him to do about Jim as his friend and what his conscience tells him to do about Jim as a slave. Reflecting back on the Jefferson essay (see Section II), how does a slaveholding society influence its members to see slaves as inhuman?
- Twain wrote in a journal that "*Huck Finn* is a book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat." What do you think he meant by "a sound heart and a deformed conscience?" How is "conscience" a theme in the novel in general?
- What is a hero? Have students brainstorm a class definition. How is Jim a hero? How is Huck a hero?
- What do you think is the climax of the novel? Why?

Activities

- Have students work in small groups to find passages in the novel that reflect the plantation stereotypes they have studied. (You may want to direct them to particular chapters of the book that critics have targeted, such as Chapter 8 on investing money; the "French debate" in Chapter 14; Chapter 22 on stealing; Chapter 24 and the King Lear outfit; Chapter 42 and the entire ending in which Jim aids wounded Tom.) Does Jim ever go beyond being a stereotype? If so, when and how? Have a class debate or discussion in which each small group takes a stand that students can back up with evidence from the novel.
- After choosing either Huck or Jim, have students to go back through the book and copy down lines, phrases, or words that describe that character or tell something important about him, or something he did, said, or thought. Then have the students arrange the words and phrases so that they tell something important about the character, forming a "character poem." Ask for student volunteers to read their work aloud. (This exercise can either begin or be the culmination of a class discussion about character analysis.)

- Have students keep a reader's response journal about Jim, tracing their feelings about him as they read. At the end of the *Huck Finn* unit, have them write a concluding essay on how they feel about Jim overall.
- Let student volunteers role play Jim and Huck. Let the class pose as reporters at a press conference. Have them list questions they'd like to have the characters answer—for example, they might ask Jim how he felt when he was "enslaved" again on Phelps Farm, or they might ask Huck to comment on what happened at the end of the book after he "lit out for the territories"—and then conduct the interview. Afterward, have students review both the questions asked and the answers given. Are there any additions or corrections that should be made? Explore with the class new insights or observations they have about the characters.
- Ask students to consider Professor Keita's suggestion that Jim, not Huck, is the central character. Do they agree or disagree? Have students defend their answer in the form of an essay, citing specific passages from the book to support their answer. You may want to hold a forum or town meeting where students can present their opinions individually or in small groups. To extend this activity, have students rewrite a scene from the book from Jim's point of view. How would it change the meaning of the book and the novel itself?

...I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Chapter 31

illustration by Elliott Banfield

Section IV:
The Novel as Satire

Suggested length: 7–14 days

This section of the curriculum focuses on *Huck Finn* as satire —a lens through which most English teachers have traditionally looked at the novel. Many of the questions and activities, which help students understand what satire is, and how Twain uses this form to ridicule and rebuke the slaveholding society of *Huck Finn*, will probably be familiar. Here students are asked to think about Twain's satire and the author's intent in terms of the controversy surrounding the book.

Review with the class the meaning of satire and irony and how they differ. You may also have students read literary criticism that explores this topic in relation to *Huck Finn*. In addition to the essays noted below, you may want to use the following books: *Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Bloom's Notes Contemporary Literary Views Book*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1996) and *Huck Finn among the Critics: A Centennial Selection*, edited by Thomas M. Inge (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985).

Companion Readings for Teachers and Students

Hoffman, Michael J. "Huck's Ironic Circle." In *Modern Critical Interpretations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, 31–44.

Marx, Leo. "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn." In *The Critical Response to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Laurie Champion. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991, 50–60.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think the author chose Huck—an illiterate boy—as the voice through which to tell this story?
- Why have the Phelps Farm section and the ending of the novel been considered problematic by critics over the years? How does the current controversy echo and extend those complaints?
- Is Mark Twain speaking through Huck, or do you think Huck's point of view is different from Twain's? Explain.
- Is Twain speaking through Jim, or is Jim's point of view different from Twain's? Explain.
- Who uses the word "nigger"? Based on who is speaking, what might have been the effect on a nineteenth-century reader? What do you think Twain is saying in how he uses the word?
- Huck begins and ends the novel by revealing his discomfort with being "sivilized." Why do you think he feels this way? What do you think Twain's message is?

this page and opposite: Illustrations by E.W. Kemble, from the first American edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

...and so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more. But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Chapter the Last

Activities

- How is using satire different from delivering an overt message? After exploring the meaning of irony and satire, ask students to find a section of *Huck Finn* that they think is particularly satirical and summarize it in a one- or two-sentence "message." Discuss with students how and why what Twain did in Huck Finn is different from delivering his message outright.
- Bring in or ask students to bring in something from popular culture that employs satire to make its point (an episode of *The Simpsons*, for instance). What is the writer's point of view about the society he or she portrays? How can you tell? How is he or she using satire? Now ask students to answer those same questions about *Huck Finn*. You might then have students form small groups and find as many similarities as they can between the two works, such as similar targets of the authors' satires, methods of satirizing, or even reactions from the public when the piece was first presented. In reporting back to the class, each group might also identify the scene in each work that shows the most effective use of satire.
- Stage a challenge for students: Have them work in small groups and give them twenty minutes to list as many examples of irony or satire in the novel as they can find. As each group shares some of its selections, let the rest of the class discuss whether the instances cited are, in fact, satirical or ironic.
- Direct students to Chapter 6, in which the drunken Pap Finn uses the word "nigger" multiple times. Why might Twain have used the word here with such frequency? Ask students to rewrite the speech without using the word, or by changing it to "slave" or "African American." Have the class discuss how changing this word changes the meaning or impact of the section. How does this scene support or refute the charge that the book is racist? Students can also use a section from John Wallace's version, *The Adventures of Huck Finn Adapted* (Falls Church, VA: John H. Wallace and Sons Co., 1983), in which he rewrites *Huck Finn* without using "nigger."
- As Huck and Jim journey down the Mississippi, readers may begin to notice that their experiences alone on the raft, or in nature in general, are very different from their experiences whenever they are on the shore in "sivilization." What is Twain saying by creating this division? Have each student construct his or her own map of the journey. Each map should show what they believe are the most important events in the novel, and should include a significant quote at each map point. Overall, their maps should visually express the symbolic differences between the river and "sivilization."

Section V:
Reclaiming the Self—The Legacy of Slavery

Suggested length: 7–14 days

Ending the *Huck Finn* unit with a look at slave narratives and an examination of the legacy of slavery today is essential to teaching *Huck Finn* in a fuller context. Students who may not have studied slavery in other classes will better understand Twain's account of slavery as fiction. They will also examine the conditions under which slaves lived, and the varied ways in which they resisted these conditions. Although we suggest reading Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, you may want to use other readings from *The Classic Slave Narratives*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Mentor, 1987), such as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Students will thus end their study of the book with an image of slaves not as passive or helpless, but as strong and proud.

SOME STUDENTS MAY reevaluate Jim in a less favorable light after reading other slave narratives. This provides a good opportunity to review Twain's goals in writing the novel and the difference between the impact and power of fiction versus nonfiction. The suggested poems will help make some of the themes in this section clearer. Have students read "If We Must Die" and "For My People" to examine the issues of resistance and the legacy of slavery. Discussion and activities will help students explore the legacy of slavery today, and, through a final look at *Huck Finn*, will tie all the pieces of the unit together.

The topics in this section are complex and rich enough to be studied for much longer than two weeks. What follows here, however, are readings, discussion questions, and activities whose primary goal is to help students connect a study of slave life and resistance to their study of *Huck Finn*. (The resources listed here and in the Bibliography on pages 36–38 can also support a deeper study.) Additional background may also be given by films such as the *Africans in America* series (see page 39 for more information). You may want to team-teach with a history teacher a lesson about life under slavery.

Companion Readings for Teachers and Students

Note: These poems can be found in various anthologies.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "Sympathy." In *Crossing the DangerWater: Three Hundred Years of African American Writing*, edited by Deirdre Mullane. New York: Anchor Books, 1993, 351.

Harper, Frances W. "The Slave Auction." In *Children of Promise: African American Literature and Art for Young People*, edited by Charles Sullivan. New York: Harry A. Abrams, Inc., 1991, 40.

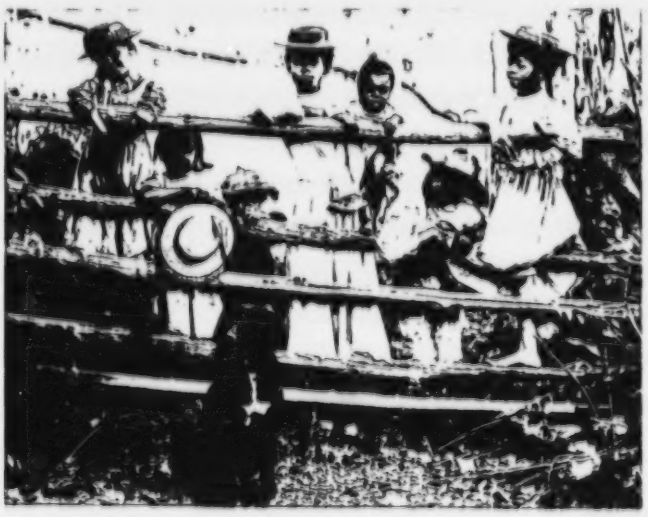
McKay, Claude. "If We Must Die." In *Crossing the DangerWater: Three Hundred Years of African American Writing*, edited by Deirdre Mullane. New York: Anchor Books, 1993, 467.

Mintz, Steven. "Introduction" and "Conditions of Life." In *African American Voices: The Life Cycle of Slavery*, edited by Steven Mintz. Revised edition. St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993, 1–28 and 69–83.

Salem, Dorothy C. "Slave Resistance." In *The Journey: A History of the African American Experience*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1997, 116–124.

Walker, Margaret. "For My People." In *Children of Promise: African American Literature and Art for Young People*, edited by Charles Sullivan. New York: Harry A. Abrams, Inc., 1991, 99.

Children in Virginia, c. 1900



Discussion Questions

- Does *Huck Finn* contain a realistic portrayal of slave life? Why or why not?
- In what ways did slaves resist?
- How did Jim maintain his pride, dignity, and integrity, despite being enslaved? How did he resist slavery?
- What did freedom mean to Jim?
- What did freedom mean to Huck?
- How does reading Douglass's autobiography affect your understanding of and feelings about *Huck Finn*?
- Douglass writes, "You have seen how a man was made a slave; now you shall see how a slave was made a man." What does he mean? How can you apply this quote to the story of Jim in *Huck Finn*?
- Look again at the definition of a hero (see page 22). Does Frederick Douglass fit the description? How does he compare to Jim and Huck?

THE ORIGINAL CHERRY HILL curriculum suggests that students will more fully appreciate the character of Jim if they understand the importance of folk religion and superstition and their place in African American culture. To add this to the section, you may want to consult the following sources:

- "Black Religious Thought in America, Part I: Origins." In ***Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*** by James H. Cone (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999)
- "Chapter 5." In ***Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices*** by Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)
- "Conjure" by Albert Raboteau. In ***Slavery in American Society***, edited by Lawrence Goodheart (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 1993)

Activities

- To bridge a reading of Frederick Douglass or other slave narratives with your study of *Huck Finn*, have students do one or both of the following activities:

  a. What would Jim want to say to Frederick Douglass if he read his autobiography? What would Frederick Douglass want to say to Jim if he read *Huck Finn*? Have students write an exchange of letters or dialogue between the two.

  b. Have students work in small groups to find as many points of comparison between the two texts as they can, such as beliefs about slaves, descriptions of slave life and slave masters, stereotyping, and themes of family, learning, freedom, superstition, or religion. Ask each group to take one of these topics and find quotes from both texts that illustrate their commonality on that issue. Then have each group create a visual representation in the form of a poster, drawing, or cartoon that expresses the common meaning.
- *Huck Finn* was written after slavery was abolished but during a very turbulent time in American history. How did this affect what Twain wrote? Ask students to imagine that they are Mark Twain and to write a letter from him to his editor explaining how the events of the period influenced him to write *Huck Finn* not as the simple boy's adventure story he originally intended but as an indictment of slavery and racism instead.

Frederick Douglass, 1848

- Have students write their own "For My People" poem, in which they define who their "people" are and describe them in similar terms. Have students share their poems and combine them into a class book to keep on display.
- Have students research the historical background during which Claude McKay wrote "If We Must Die." Ask them to write or report on the conditions that existed, and then have them analyze what the speaker of the poem means by "fighting back."

Section VI:
Final Projects

Choose one or more of these culminating activities to wrap up the unit.

- Some people feel that race relations in America today are still influenced by the legacy of slavery. What is that legacy? How does it relate to reading *Huck Finn*? Throughout the unit, have students individually or in small groups collect newspaper and magazine articles, music lyrics, poems, excerpts from books, artwork, and so forth, that they believe in some way express how America is still affected by slavery today. At the end of the unit students can either do a short oral or multimedia presentation on their findings, or they can create a "book" in which these findings are collected and annotated.
- Is or isn't *Huck Finn* racist? Does reading *Huck Finn* help or harm race relations? Have students stage a mock trial with the book or Mark Twain as the defendant. (You may want to visit the Web site www.ilstu.edu/depts/labschl/ep/vol3/twain.html, which contains a detailed lesson plan on staging a trial, developed by teacher Diane Walker.) Have students present the evidence they have been gathering (see page 17). Students could also explore this question in a talk show format featuring Huck, Jim, Twain, and anyone else—real or imagined, living or dead—they believe might add to the conversation. Before doing this activity, it may be helpful to have students first revisit the class definition of racism.
- Writer David Bradley notes that many have criticized the ending of *Huck Finn* but "none of them has been able to suggest—much less write—a better ending. . . . They failed for the same reason that Twain wrote the ending as he did: America has never been able to write a better ending. America has never been able to write any ending at all." What do you think he means? Ask students to imagine they were Mark Twain's editor and to write Twain a letter explaining why and how he should change the ending. (To extend this activity, have students actually rewrite the ending, and compare their versions to the original.)
- Gerry Brenner, in his essay "More Than a Reader's Response: A Letter to 'De Ole True Huck'" (in *A Case Study in Critical Controversy: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Gerald Graff and James Phelan, Boston: Bedford Books, 1995) pretends Jim has read *Huck Finn* and written a response in which he sets the record straight. Ask students to do the same, or pretend to be Jim writing a short review of the book. How would Jim's version differ from Huck's? Have students compare and contrast their ideas with Brenner's article.
- Have students write a scene or a "treatment" for a new movie or novel, set in contemporary times, in which Huck and Jim meet and become friends. Who would they be today? What would their issues be? Where would their journey take place?
- Ask students to write Huck's diary entry if he were to visit their high school in the present day. What would he think of what he sees?
- Have students review the case of Kathy Monteiro and her complaint to the Tempe, Arizona, school board, as shown in the "Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" film. Do they agree or disagree with her? Let groups or individual students prepare a presentation to a Board of Education in which they argue either for or against teaching the novel in the school curriculum. Remind students to anticipate the objections that might come from different members of the community, including parents, teachers, religious leaders, students, and administrators.

Mark Twain, 1905

Teaching Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Despite the fact that it is the most taught novel and most taught work of American literature in American schools from junior high to graduate school, *Huckleberry Finn* remains a hard book to read and a hard book to teach. The difficulty is caused by two distinct but related problems. First, one must understand how Socratic irony works if the novel is to make any sense at all; most students don't. Secondly, one must be able to place the novel in a larger historical and literary context—one that includes the history of American racism and the literary productions of African-American writers—if the book is to be read as anything more than a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (which it both is and is not); most students can't. These two problems pose real obstacles for teachers. Are they surmountable? Under some circumstances, yes. Under others, perhaps not. I think under most circumstances, however, they are obstacles you can deal with.

It is impossible to read *Huck Finn* intelligently without understanding that Mark Twain's consciousness and awareness is larger than that of any of the characters in the novel, including Huck. Indeed, part of what makes the book so effective is the fact that Huck is too innocent and ignorant to understand what's wrong with his society and what's right about his own transgressive behavior. Twain, on the other hand, knows the score. One must be skeptical about most of what Huck says in order to hear what Twain is saying. In a 1991 interview, Ralph Ellison suggested that critics who condemn Twain for the portrait of Jim that we get in the book forget that "one also has to look at the teller of the tale, and realize that you are getting a black man, an adult, seen through the condescending eyes—partially—of a young white boy." Are you saying, I asked Ellison, "that those critics are making the same old mistake of confusing the narrator with the author? That they're saying that Twain saw him that way rather than that Huck did?" "Yes," was Ellison's answer.

Clemens as a child accepted without question, as Huck did, the idea that slaves were property; neither wanted to be called a "low-down Abolitionist" if he could possibly help it. Between the time of that Hannibal childhood and adolescence, however, and the years in which Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain's consciousness changed. By 1885, when the book was published, Samuel Clemens held views that were very different from those he ascribed to Huck. It might be helpful at this point to chart for your students the growth of the author's developing moral awareness on the subject of race and racism—starting with some of his writings on the persecution of the Chinese in San Francisco (such as "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy"), then moving through his marriage into an abolitionist family, the 1869 anti-lynching editorial that he published in *The Buffalo Express* entitled "Only a Nigger," and his exposure to figures like Frederick Douglass and his father-in-law, Jervis Langdon.

By the time he wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, Samuel Clemens had come to believe not only that slavery was a horrendous wrong, but that white Americans owed black Americans some form of "reparations" for it. One graphic way to demonstrate this fact to your students is to share with them the letter Twain wrote to the Dean of the Yale Law School in 1885, in which he explained

Dr. Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Professor of American Studies and English at the University of Texas, is the author of *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1997) and *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices* (Oxford University Press, 1993). She is President of the Mark Twain Circle of America and editor of the 19-volume Oxford Mark Twain.

Adapted from a talk given at the July 1995 Summer Teachers' Institute at The Mark Twain House, Hartford, Connecticut.
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why he wanted to pay the expenses of Warner McGuinn, one of the first black law students at Yale. "We have ground the manhood out of them," Twain wrote Dean Wayland on Christmas Eve, 1885, "and the shame is ours, not theirs, & we should pay for it."

Ask your students: why does a writer who holds these views create a narrator who is too innocent and ignorant to challenge the topsy-turvy moral universe that surrounds him? "All right, then, I'll *go* to Hell," Huck says when he decides not to return Jim to slavery. Samuel Clemens might be convinced that slavery itself and its legacy are filled with shame, but Huck is convinced that his reward for defying the moral norms of his society will be eternal damnation.

Mark Twain and John Lewis, a servant whom Twain admired and may have been a model for Jim.

Something new happened in *Huck Finn* that had never happened in American literature before. It was a book, as many critics have observed, that served as a Declaration of Independence from the genteel English novel tradition. *Huckleberry Finn* allowed a different kind of writing to happen: a clean, crisp, no-nonsense, earthy vernacular kind of writing that jumped off the printed page with unprecedented immediacy and energy; it was a book that talked. Huck's voice, combined with Twain's satiric genius, changed the shape of fiction in America, and African-American voices had a great deal to do with making it what it was. Expose your students to the work of some of Twain's African-American contemporaries, such as Frederick Douglass, Charles Chesnutt, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Those voices can greatly enrich students' understanding of both the issues *Huckleberry Finn* raises and the vernacular style in which it raises them.

If W.E.B. Du Bois was right that the problem of the twentieth century is the color line, one would never know it from the average secondary-school syllabus, which often avoids issues of race almost completely. Like a Trojan horse, however, *Huck Finn* can slip into the American literature classroom as a "classic," only to engulf students in heated debates about prejudice and racism, conformity, autonomy, authority, slavery and freedom. It is a book that puts on the table the very questions the culture so often tries to bury, a book that opens out into the complex history that shaped it—the history of the ante-bellum era in which the story is set, and the history of the post-war period in which the book was written—and it requires us to address that history as well. Much of that history is painful. Indeed, it is to avoid confronting the raw pain of that history that black parents sometimes mobilize to ban the novel. Brushing history aside, however, is no

solution to the larger challenge of dealing with its legacy. Neither is placing the task of dealing with it on one book.

We continue to live, as a nation, in the shadow of racism while being simultaneously committed, on paper, to principles of equality. As Ralph Ellison observed in our interview, it is this irony at the core of the American experience that Mark Twain forces us to confront head-on.

History as it is taught in the history classroom is often denatured and dry. You can keep your distance from it if you choose. Slaveholding was evil. Injustice was the law of the land. History books teach that. But they don't require you to look the perpetrators of that evil in the eye and find yourself looking at a kind, gentle, good-hearted Aunt Sally. They don't make you understand that it was not the villains who made the system work, but the ordinary folks, the good folks, the folks who did nothing more than fail to question the set of circumstances that surrounded them, who failed to judge that evil as evil and who deluded themselves into thinking they were doing good, earning safe passage for themselves into heaven.

When accomplished fiction writers expose the all-too-human betrayals that well-meaning human beings perpetrate in the name of business-as-usual, they disrupt the ordered rationalizations that insulate the heart from pain. Novelists, like surgeons, cut straight to the heart. But unlike surgeons, they don't sew up the wound. They leave it open to heal or fester, depending on the septic level of the reader's own environment.

Irony, history, and racism all painfully intertwine in our past and present, and they all come together in *Huck Finn*. Because racism is endemic to our society, a book like *Huck Finn*, which brings the problem to the surface, can explode like a hand grenade in a literature classroom accustomed to the likes of *Macbeth* or *Great Expectations*—works which exist at a safe remove from the lunch-room or the playground. If we lived in a world in which racism had been eliminated generations before, teaching *Huck Finn* would be a piece of cake. Unfortunately that's not the world we live in. The difficulties we have teaching this book reflect the difficulties we continue to confront in our classrooms and our nation. As educators, it is incumbent upon us to teach our students to decode irony, to understand history, and to be repulsed by racism and bigotry wherever they find it. But this is the task of a lifetime. It's unfair to force one novel to bear the burden—alone—of addressing these issues and solving these problems. But *Huck Finn*—and you—can make a difference. ■

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Film Index

Born to Trouble: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Mark Twain in front of his boyhood home in Hannibal, Missouri, 1902

Segment One

Starting image:
Mississippi River at dawn with an image of the *Huck Finn* manuscript superimposed upon it

Ending image:
Slaves tilling a field

Approximate length:
17 minutes

The book *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is introduced, as is Mark Twain and his experience growing up in the slaveholding town of Hannibal, Missouri. The film moves to McClintock High School in Tempe, Arizona, where Kathy Monteiro and her daughter, Raquel Panton, object to *Huck Finn* as required reading due to the use of the word "nigger" in the novel.

The importance of the location and time period in which *Huck Finn* takes place is discussed. Early events in the novel are introduced, ending with Huck and Jim taking off together on the raft.

Monteiro and principal Mike Gemma talk about First Amendment rights and how the controversy over the book arose. The use of the word "nigger," both past and present, is explored. An excerpt from *Huck Finn* is read, containing one of the first encounters with the word: "Jim was monstrous proud about it . . . that nigger was cooked up and had to take a back seat."

Segment Two

Starting image:
A chandelier

Ending image:
Illustration of a man holding a poster of a runaway slave

Approximate length:
14 minutes

The film explains the very different controversy that arose when *Huck Finn* was first published, when it was deemed unfit for children primarily because it portrayed rough characters, used slang and vernacular language, and presented a main character who questioned societal rules. Twain's early use of satire is explored. Twain's marriage into an abolitionist family is examined.

David Bradley, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, and Jim Miller discuss various historical and literary aspects of the novel. The significance of Twain writing *Huck Finn* during the centennial of the Declaration of Independence is explored. An excerpt from *Huck Finn* is read: "They are floating down the river . . . they begin to suspect the truth." A discussion of Jim as the hero of the novel leads to a recap and commentary on events in the novel, ending with the Duke and the King exposing Jim as a runaway slave.

Twain's wife Olivia and children

Segment Three

Starting image:
People walking across the street at night in Tempe, Arizona

Ending image:
Twain sitting at a piano

Approximate time:
19 minutes

Monteiro and Panton meet with other families to discuss the handling of racially sensitive material by schools, during which they talk about their feelings about the word "nigger."

The issue of Jim as a stereotype or complex character is discussed. Race relations in present-day Hannibal, Missouri, are explored. Twain's work on the novel and his wife Olivia's help are shown. More of the early controversy around the book as "indecent" is examined.

Gemma and Monteiro comment on the way McClintock has handled the *Huck Finn* situation. Monteiro files a lawsuit against the Tempe Union High School District and individual governing members.

Twain's relationships with people of color are explored.

Segment Four

Starting image:
The Mississippi skyline and river

Ending image:
Ronald Reagan at a podium

Approximate length:
12 minutes

Huck's moral dilemma around turning in Jim is discussed. Gemma invites consultant Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua to McClintock to talk to educators and students about the novel. After Chadwick-Joshua's presentation to students, she, Monteiro, and Panton talk and disagree about the effectiveness of her presentation.

The film covers the bans, actual and threatened, that libraries imposed on the novel after publication; *Huck Finn*'s elevation, in the 1930s, to the canon of classic literature; and the NAACP declaration in 1957 that it found the book offensive, leading the book to be taken out of some schools.

Segment Five

Starting image:
Trees hanging over the Mississippi River

Ending image:
End of the film

Approximate length:
20 minutes

The film reviews the events of the last quarter of the novel. The controversial ending and the difficulty of teaching *Huck Finn* are discussed. Boston Latin School teacher Nancy Methelis and her students discuss their reactions to *Huck Finn*. Monteiro, at the police station, recounts how she was handcuffed and forcibly removed from the auditorium after she came to Chadwick-Joshua's lecture the second day.

People from different ethnicities and countries discuss how they feel about the novel. Bradley, Chadwick-Joshua, and Miller talk about the place of literature in society. The film ends with an excerpt: "We catched fish, and talked. . . . and it warn't often that we laughed, only a little kind of a low chuckle."

General Resources

Web Sites

Note: Web addresses and information contained in the Web sites are subject to change.

Africans in America
http://www.pbs.org/africansinamerica
The companion site to the PBS series offers hundreds of primary source documents, scholarly essays, stories from the series, teaching activities, and more.

American Slave Narratives
http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/wpa/wpahome.html
Narratives of former slaves of the ninteenth century, documented from 1936 to 1938.

Apple Learning Interchange's Curriculum Resource for Huck Finn
http://henson.austin.apple.com/edres/shlessons/sh-lithuckfinn.shtml
Directs students to do several activities to culminate in a presentation to a Board of Education on whether or not *Huck Finn* should be removed from the classroom.

Censorship—the Page of Diana Mason
http://scnc.bas.k12.mi.us/~dmason/index.html
A teacher describes her own fight against a censorship challenge, summarizes the issues, and discusses ways to handle teaching controversial issues.

Culture Shock

www.pbs.org/cultureshock
Log on in January 2000 to find resources for arts controversies from ancient times to the present; in-depth information on the themes and topics in the CULTURE SHOCK films; primary sources, images, and audio clips; interactive activities on censorship issues; and much more. Since the content deals with controversial issues and images, preview the web site before assigning it or using it with students.

Huck Finn and Censorship Teacher Cyberguide
http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/huckcen/huckcentg.html
A supplemental unit to *Huck Finn* developed as part of the Schools of California Online Resources for Educators Project. Written by Nancy Middlemas, it suggests creative activities to explore charges that the novel is racist, and provides links to primary sources.

Mark Twain Forum
web.mit.edu/linguistics/www/forum/twainweb.html
An online forum/news group of interest to Twain scholars and specialists.

Mark Twain Home Page
marktwain.miningco.com
This site contains complete texts of some of Twain's works, as well as biographies, literary criticism, analyses of censorship, and links to many other Twain sites. (Note: The *miningco.com* site will be changing its name to *about.com*.)

Mark Twain in His Times
http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/index2.html
Archival materials, including images, reviews, and article, which focus on Mark Twain and how his works were created, defined, and marketed.

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
http://www.ncte.org/
Teaching ideas, policy statements, books, discussions, and other kinds of support for English teachers. Their new American Collection site (www.nctеamericancollection.org/) contains many author links, including Mark Twain.

Slavery in the United States
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/psources/slavery.html
Part of the American Memory project of the Library of Congress, this site provides extensive primary source documents from 1790 to 1865.

The Trial of Mark Twain
http://www.ilstu.edu/depts/labschl/ep/vol3/twain.html
English teacher Diane Walker developed this exercise for students to do after completing a unit on *Huck Finn*. In addition to teaching tips, it sets up the roles (judge, clerk, jury, witnesses, prosecution, defense, etc.) and the procedure of the trial.

Organizations

American Booksellers Association
828 S. Broadway
Tarrytown, NY 10591
914/591-2665
This trade organization for booksellers includes the Foundation for Free Expression, which co-sponsors Banned Books Week and other anti-censorship activities.

American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611
800/545-2433
www.ala.org
The ALA supports intellectual freedom and free access to libraries and library materials through its Office of Intellectual Freedom. It publishes pamphlets, articles, posters, newsletters, and the Banned Books Week Resource Kit.

The Anti-Defamation League
823 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
212/885-7700
www.adl.org
An organization devoted to combating anti-Semitism and bigotry. Resources include A World of Difference® Institute, an anti-bias training and curriculum.

Mark Twain Circle of America
Professor John Bird,
Executive Coordinator, English Dept.
Winthrop University
Rock Hill, SC 29733
http://www.citadel.edu/faculty/leonard/mtcircular/htm
An organization for scholars, teachers, and others interested in Mark Twain and his work; sponsers meetings about Twain at the Modern Language Association and the American Literature Association conventions, and publishes a quarterly newsletter.

The Mark Twain House, Hartford, Connecticut

Mark Twain House
351 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
860/247-0998
www.hartnet.org/twain
The Mark Twain House, a museum and research center located in the nineteen-room mansion custom built for Samuel L. Clemens in Hartford, Connecticut, offers tours of the home where Twain lived with his family from 1874 to 1891. The mission of the Mark Twain House, which is on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, is to foster an appreciation of Mark Twain as one of the nation's defining cultural figures and to demonstrate the continued relevance of his work, life, and times. Contact the Education Department at extension 36 for teacher resources.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
4805 Mt. Hope Drive
Baltimore, MD 21215
410/358-8900
410/358-3813 fax
www.naacp.org
An advocacy organization dedicated to achieving equal rights and eliminating racial prejudice.

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road
Urbana, IL 61801
800/369-6283
www.ncte.org
NCTE, a professional organization of over 70,000 English and language arts teachers, includes educators from elementary school through college throughout the country. It provides a variety of resources, including Web site forums, publications, teaching ideas, policy statements, and professional development meetings and conferences.

People for the American Way
2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
202/467-4999
www.pfaw.org
PAW distributes educational materials, leaflets, and brochures to promote diversity and tolerance and publishes an annual report on censorship attempts in schools.

Teaching Tolerance
400 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104
334/264-0286
www.splcenter.org/teachingtolerance.html
The national education project of the Southern Poverty Law Center helps educators foster equity, respect, and understanding in the classroom and beyond. Resources include a bi-annual magazine and video-and-text teaching kits.

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Other Materials

Rationales for Challenged Books (CD-ROM). NCTE in partnership with IRA. 1998. Provides rationales for over 170 books and films, including reviews, plot, classroom assignments, and teaching objectives and methods. To order, contact NCTE at 1-800-369-6283.

*Also mentioned in the "*Huck Finn* in Context" curriculum.

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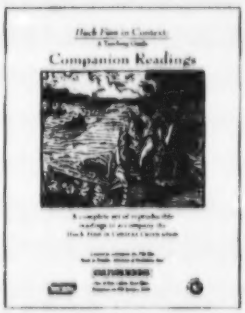

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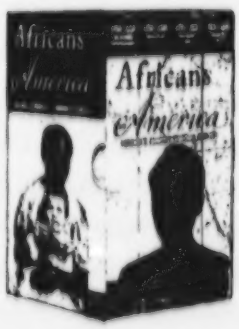

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